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VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Also by LeGette Blythe

MARSHAL NEY: A DUAL LIFE

ALEXANDRIANA

SHOUT FREEDOM!

BOLD GALILEAN

WILLIAM HENRY BELK: MERCHANT OF THE SOUTH

A TEAR FOR JUDAS

MIRACLE IN THE HILLS
(with Mary Martin Sloop, M.D.)

4-10-56

VOICE in the WILDERNESS

A Play with Music, Song,
Dance and Pantomime

By LeGette Blythe, 1888-

4.5 25-51

Staged in commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the establishment of Presbyterianism in the region of Old Mecklenburg.

CHARLOTTE WILLIAM LOFTIN PUBLISHERS
1955

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Shepherd Bros., Inc., CHARLOTTE, N. C.

VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

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TIME

The Eighteenth Century

PLACE

Ireland and America

Act I

Scene 1: Prologue
Scene 2: A village in County Donegal, Ireland, 1714
Scene 3: A Catawba Indian Village
Scene 4: The same
Scene 5: The Wilderness of Mecklenburg, 1750
Scene 6: Davidson's Ordinary, Centre Community
Scene 7: The Richard Barry Home, Hopewell
Scene 8: The Wilderness, Rocky River Community
Scene 9: Cowpasture River, Western Virginia
Scene 10: Original Sugaw Creek Church

Act II

Scene 1: Ordinary at Phifer's Mill
Scene 2: Tryon Street, Charlottetown
Scene 3: Tryon Street, Charlottetown
Scene 5: Near Sugaw Creek Church
Scene 5: McDowell home, south of Charlottetown
Scene 6: Graveyard, Hopewell Church
Scene 7: Tryon Street, Charlottetown, 1781
Scene 8: Original Sugaw Creek Church

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

Stated Clerk
Minister
First Man
Second Man
First Woman
Third Man
Second Woman
Fourth Man
Rev. Thomas Craighead
Alexander Craighead, *as a boy*
Rev. William Holmes
Bagpiper
Sword Dancer
Indian Crier
Drummer
Indian Dancer
Hector McElrath
Neill Osborne
Rev. John Thomson
William Lee Davidson
Woman
Rev. Hugh McAden
Rev. Alexander Craighead
Proprietor
First Lounger
Second Lounger
Third Lounger
First Man

Second Man
Third Man
John Davidson
Rider
Man
Colonel Thomas Polk
Abraham Alexander
Rev. Hezekiah J. Balch
Dr. Ephraim Brevard
Will Kennon
Man
Voice in Crowd
Woman
Suzy
Andy
Joe Graham
Mrs. McDowell
British Officer
Pastor McCaule
Abner
John McKnitt Alexander.
Rev. James Hall

Also, Citizens, Highland Dancers, Indian Maidens, British Soldiers, Dancers, Congregation, Old Beloved Man, Mrs. Davidson.

Act I

SCENE I

As the twilight deepens and the people are assembling, the organ is playing in low tones a medley of eighteenth century songs of the church. The stage is in darkness. With the arrival of the hour for the beginning of the play the organ is silent and in the center foreground the orchestra starts the overture, which ends on a note of triumphant praise. The overture finished, the lights on the musicians' stands go out, and now the audience, the orchestra, and the stage are in complete darkness. After a moment's silence, the Stated Clerk, not yet revealed, speaks.

STATED CLERK

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight."

Momentary pause.

"I am the light of the world."

Momentary pause.

A wilderness. A voice. A light. Has ever a night been so black that it could swallow the light of one small candle? Was ever a wilderness so lost that it could stifle the sound of one voice crying? The wilderness and the night cannot withstand a voice and a light. One feeble

flame is stronger than all the darkness of a universe; one lone voice possesses more power than a thousand thundering cannon.

So as you sit now in momentary darkness, friends, search out the light of vanished years; in the stillness listen for the voice of days long gone; close your eyes and see; stop your ears to other sounds and hear, for neither is the light extinguished nor the voice hushed; rather has the one flamed and the other swelled. If you see not the light of other years and hear not the voice that yet crieth out of days long spent, say not that they are lost and done; understand rather that your eyes and your ears are not attuned.

Attune them then! For tonight we sit upon ground hallowed and historic, in the midst of countless enduring lights and voices as real and as triumphant as the present mighty substance of their sturdy faith and glorious dreaming!

The lights go up brightly on a choral group standing in two rows, one elevated behind the other, in a log structure set at an angle out left from the center stage. Members of the group, men and women, are dressed in clothing of the pioneer period in the Carolinas, a few in broadcloth and satin, most of them in hunting shirts and plain dress of the frontier. Their director strikes his tuning fork, leads them in spirited song, as the orchestra plays a low accompaniment. As the song ends, the light fades on the singers and comes up on the Stated Clerk, now for the first time revealed in clerical garb and standing before a pulpit set in a cubicle left of choir and slightly above and in advance of it.

STATED CLERK

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our play, which we offer to the praise of God and in commemoration of the two hundredth anniversary of the organization of Presbyterianism in this region. Significantly, we are assembled at the spot where the organized denomination had its start in present Mecklenburg. Some few hundred steps behind you and at your right is Sugaw Creek Church and a little way westward from it is the old burying ground and the site of the congregation's original log house of worship. Within a small fenced square in this ancient graveyard lies Alexander Craighead, first pastor of Sugaw Creek and neighboring Rocky River Churches, father of Presbyterianism in the Piedmont and impassioned advocate of religious and civil freedom. Tonight we their sons and daughters, by blood and in the church, delight to honor him and his compatriots.

Almost from the beginnings of the settlement of this wilderness region the Presbyterians had sought to establish churches and have ministers sent to them. But preachers were few, and for more than a decade no pastor had accepted a call. In 1751, however, the Reverend John Thomson, a devoted adherent of Old Side Presbyterianism, came south to visit his daughter in the Centre community and preached in this region until his death two years later. And in September, 1754, the New Side Synod of New York, "taking into consideration the destitute condition of Virginia and North Carolina," as that body expressed it, assigned four missionaries "to make a visit to those parts for the space of three months." Within the next year two of these men,

Messrs. Beatty and Thane, came south, and church historians believe that Reverend Mr. Thane preached either to an already organized congregation at Sugaw Creek or led in the organization of such a fellowship.

Governor Arthur Dobbs also in the summer of 1755 made a visit to his holdings in the vicinity of Rocky River and Sugaw Creek and later wrote a letter describing the settlers he found here:

"They are a colony from Ireland removed from Pennsylvania, of what we call Scotch Irish Presbyterians who with others in the neighboring Tracts had settled together in order to have a teacher of their own opinion and choice."

Three years later the two churches installed the Reverend Alexander Craighead as pastor. Relentless enemy of intolerance, fiery evangel of freedom, he spoke out his opinions courageously and with conviction.

The wilderness had found a voice. And the voice, thank God, spoke to ears and minds and hearts attuned!

The light goes out on the Stated Clerk and comes up on the choir, which sings:

"Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

The light fades on the choir, comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

Let us pray.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk, and a thin spotlight picks up a minister who rises

from one of the front seats near the center of the spectators' section.

MINISTER

For the great dark wilderness that in two centuries has grown into the mightiest nation of earth we thank Thee, O God. For the forests, the spread of grasslands, the meandering, lazy streams and the racing, roaring rivers, for the flat country and the hills, the upthrust mighty mountains, for all the unmeasured resources of nature given us out of Thy bountiful hand, O Lord of nations, we are grateful.

But even more thankful are we for the voice in that wilderness, the voice that proclaimed the Good News even in that long gone day, for the many voices that in the years succeeding have brought our fathers and us the beautiful story. We give Thee thanks that they of the early days had ears to hear and hearts to heed those voices.

But most of all, O our Father, we give thanks to Thee for the Light, the glorious Light that is Thy Son Jesus our Lord. We pray that His warming, healing, saving Light may shine in our present day upon a world cold and wandering and greatly needful.

For our Presbyterian denomination that in this community has been such an influence in the promotion of good things of the spirit, O God, we are deeply grateful. We pray that it may grow in strength and grace through the coming years to do Thy Will.

But we thank Thee even more for the universal church of Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, for what it has meant to our beloved land and all the world. May it be

a voice and a light triumphant in lost earth's every fearsome wilderness. In His name we pray. Amen.

The spotlight fades on the minister and comes up on the Choir, which sings:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

The light fades on the Choir, comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

Church historians say that the first regularly organized churches in America were established as Rehoboth and Snow Hill, Maryland, about 1684 by the Reverend Francis Makemie, who died in 1708.

But Mecklenburg Presbyterianism went far back to its nurturing mother Scotland and its transplanting to Ireland, in whose Ulster counties in the north the British sovereign had settled sturdy Scotch folk on the estates of certain overthrown and dispossessed revolting Irish nobles.

To northern Ireland these Scotsmen had brought their thrift, their love of liberty, and their Presbyterianism. They cultivated and restored the impoverished soil, repaired or built anew barns and houses, established kirks and laid out presbyteries, the first regularly constituted one on June 10, 1642, at Carrickfergus, and reared families to fear and love God, honor and esteem their neighbors, and demand the inherent privileges of free peoples.

As the years passed, however, troublous times came upon these transplanted Scots. Many landlords of other denominations possessing large estates refused to permit Presbyterian churches to be built on them. A newly imposed sacramental test excluded Presbyterians from all positions of public trust under the Crown. Presbyterian teachers found it virtually impossible to keep open their schools. Presbyterians were subject to prosecution in the ecclesiastical courts if they ventured to be married by Presbyterian ministers. Soon, moreover, the English government began to enact oppressive measures against the commerce and agriculture of this implanted stronghold of dissenters. And when the leases on the lands they were tilling began to expire, these harried Presbyterians quickly discovered that their landlords were doubling and trebling rents. The situation in Ulster was becoming intolerable.

When the Duke of Shrewsbury came to Dublin in 1713 a group of ministers presented him a document enumerating evils suffered by ministers and people because of the continued imposition of the sacramental test. They assured the Duke that "the melancholy apprehension of these things have put several of us upon thoughts of transplanting ourselves into America, that we may there *in a wilderness* enjoy, by the blessing of God, that ease and quiet of our consciences, persons, and families which are denied us in our native country."

But their petition brought no relief. Many disillusioned Scotch Irish, as the Scots in Ireland were called, took ship for America, happy for a chance to obtain in the new world not only a surer reward for their labor and capital, but also relief from the social and civil evils they had been enduring, and more importantly, the op-

portunity to enjoy unrestricted their worship of God.

So it came about that in the early spring of 1714 in a village square in County Donegal on the west coast of northern Ireland, a group was gathered about the round stone curbing of the well.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk.

SCENE II

The light comes up brightly on the forestage, illuminating the fronts of a two-story stone house in center rear and a one-story stone cottage at right. Villages are assembled about the well, forestage. In the space right, between the two houses, a cow and several sheep are grazing. Newly washed clothes hang on a line, right of cottage. Children are playing in the space between the houses and the well. A young man seated on the well curbing toys with a battered fife.

A man is speaking, evidently with feeling, and the others are listening intently. He pounds his fist on the well.

FIRST MAN

I tell ye a mon can na' stand it! These times are past a mon's enduring!

SECOND MAN

[*Nodding.*] Tam's right. What chance has Tam and his Martha got in County Donegal, or anywhere else in Ulster, I'll ask ye? Or me and me Sara or any o' the

rest o' ye? Look at me old father. What's he accumulated after all these years o' laboring and struggling in this hard ground and amidst these plentiful stones?

FIRST WOMAN

[*Bitterly.*] What's any of us got, except bent backs and calloused hands and wind-whipped leathery faces? Didn't my Andrew work his heart out to mend barn and granary and sheepfold and cottage? Didn't he bend his back to the sun and the wind to bring up the wornout soil so that it would yield bountifully? And did he take any rest until he was laid in his grave? [*She gestures to indicate futility.*] And now, after nigh onto thirty-three years, with the place built up and the land producing good money for the English landlord, hasn't that heartless one upped the rent on me, a widow woman, to three pounds for every one we paid when Andrew signed up to come over from Scotland and set up this place? What's a poor woman to do, neebors? That's what I'm asking ye.

THIRD MAN

[*With fife.*] Rachel's talking the plain truth. Nor is she the only widow, more's the pity, that's suffering from covetous landlords. There's mony anither in the Ulster counties, neebors. Nor is it only the widows and the orphans that's suffering; it's pretty nigh the whole of Ulster's Presbyterians. And the upping of rent's only one wrong. Look what them Parliament people in London's doing to our farming and trade. Putting more and more restrictions on what we produce—embargoes on salt meat and butter, regulations on our linen and our woolen manufactures—[*He points toward the grazing sheep.*] What good are sheep to us any more? Is

the wool worth the shearing? We can't send our woolens anywhere but to England and Wales, and we have to take whatever they give us.

SECOND WOMAN

And starve if we sell or if we don't.

FOURTH MAN

[*Warmly.*] Neebors, ye're all speaking the truth, I'll agree; but n'ane o' ye has touched on the worst o' it, unless it was Hector just now when he spoke of Ulster's Presbyterians. That's the slavery we live under. Yes, we're slaves, as ye all know. What else can we make o' it? We can nae hold office or any place of trust under the Crown except we partake of the sacrament of the Established Church, which we will nae. We must pay tithes to the support o' that church, with which we do not hold; our teachers are hard put to keep open our schools; we are fined or thrown in jail if we permit our own preachers to marry us. And few there are who'll even sell us a mite o' land on which to raise a kirk. Our Ministers—

He pauses, points toward the cottage right, through the door of which a man is emerging. This man is tall, erect, of dignified mien. He wears the dress of the Presbyterian minister, and though clean and neat, appears almost threadbare.

God bless him, here comes our preacher.

He takes a few steps to meet the minister, who advances toward the group.

Parson Craighead, we've been talking about the sad condition of our Presbyterian people throughout Ulster.

REV. THOMAS CRAIGHEAD

Of a truth, we've come on hard times. We've just been discussing it in the house yonder—my two guests and I. I think you all know my brother-in-law, Reverend William Holmes. The other one is a young minister, too, Reverend John Thomson, who was licensed last June by the Synod of Ulster.

He looks around toward the playing children, calls out:

Alexander, run here a moment, please.

A small boy detaches himself from the youngsters' game, comes quickly to his father.

Son, please run inside and ask your Uncle William and Mr. Thomson to join us.

The boy nods, runs to the house, enters it. The minister turns again to those at the well.

Have you agreed on any course that you think might improve the situation of our people?

FOURTH MAN

We had nae got that far with our talkin', Parson. We'd only been berating our covetous, robbing landlords, and expressing our opinions of the English Parliament that's been putting so many restrictions on our farming and trading and manufacturing.

CRAIGHEAD

And ye gave no thought to how your rights to worship God in the way ye choose are circumscribed and whittled away, and your preachers and yourselves are throttled and frowned upon and scorned, and your schools are closed and your kirks made light of and persecuted,

and your sons and daughters forbidden marriage by your own Presbyterian parsons?

FOURTH MAN

But, Parson, we *have* been giving thought to those very things. I was only saying as ye were coming out that the worst o' our troubles is the slavery we live under, the way we are restricted in our worship, the indignities we are put under. Those things outweigh even the great troubles we have of trying to earn our bread.

CRAIGHEAD

I'm glad you've been putting first things first. The troubles of the church were mainly what we've been talking about over there at the house.

He looks in that direction.

Here they come now.

The two men join the group, and Pastor Craighead introduces them. The women nod respectfully and the men shake hands. Young Alexander Craighead remains at the well. Craighead speaks to the other two ministers.

Out here they've been talking about the same things we were in there.

He nods toward the cottage.

THIRD MAN

It's hard for us Presbyterians to keep our troubles off our minds—and tongues—for long.

REV. WILLIIAM HOLMES

Yes, we've come on hard times, difficult days, there's nae doubt.

FIRST MAN

[*Warmly, his voice tense.*] As to that, Parson, we're all agreed. But what are we going to do about it? You're right; the times are hard. We have trials to endure because we're Presbyterians. But there's likewise the business of making a living to think about. Take me: the lease on my farm's expired and the landlord's demanding nigh four times what I've been paying him. I can't pay it neither. And there's the heavy taxes and tithes, and here of late, with the new regulations, I can't sell my wool for any decent prices, nor my flax. But those mouths at my house are still just as hungry. I ask you, Parson, what's a man going to do? I ask ye all, neebors, what can we do?

THIRD MAN

I'll tell you right quick what I aim to do. I'm going to load my wife and bairns aboard ship and go to America, that's what I'm going to do. And I'm not planting anither crop in Ireland neither. When that ship sails out of Donegal Bay next month, I aim to be on it.

SECOND WOMAN

Hector's speaking our mind likewise. My old man and I been talking it over and we're agreed to sail on that same ship.

She looks from one side to the other, and a thin smile lightens her somber face.

Neebors, why don't we all go to America where we'll be privileged to make a living and likewise be free to worship in our own way?

FIRST MAN

But the money for the passage? Where'll we get the money? Maybe some of you have it now or can get it, but there's also mony a'ne couldn't raise ane extry shilling. Had I the money myself—

THIRD MAN

[*Interrupting.*] I'm aiming to bind myself to the ship's master for the passage and work it out in America. The rest o' ye if ye have not the money can do the same, is it not so, Parson?

CRAIGHEAD

Yes, I hear it said that mony among those going to America bind themselves for their passage money.

FIRST MAN

Tell us, Mr. Craighead, what do you think of the notion? Would it be a proper course for us, d'ye think, or should we do better to stay on in Ulster?

CRAIGHEAD

John Thomson here says that in another year he's setting out for America.

He looks toward Reverend Mr. Thomson, who nods.

THIRD MAN

But what about you, Parson? Would you likewise be willing to go?

CRAIGHEAD

[*Smiling.*] The wife and I have been talking o' it and praying for guidance and Margaret thinks well o'

the idea. We both feel, I can tell ye, that it's the Lord's will that we go to the new country. And that's likewise the feeling o' William here and his wife, isn't it, Brother?

HOLMES

[*Nodding solemnly.*] Yes. We feel that God is directing us to sail for America. We want to go. We plan to go.

THIRD MAN

Praise God, Preacher! Then we can all go together. And mony anither ane from over Ulster'll join us when the ship sails.

Others excitedly join in declaring their determination to go to America, the new land of opportunity, and in the commotion the children come running.

ALEXANDER CRAIGHEAD

[*Who has been listening intently and now speaks excitedly.*] Over there in America, will we see Indians, Father, and will they let us shoot their bows and arrows?

Other children press about, ask questions. Pastor Craighead, his hand uplifted, quiets them.

CRAIGHEAD

[*Rather grimly.*] We'll probably see more Indians than we'll wish to, bairns. Nor will it be a life of ease. We will have to work long and hard. But we'll be free. This I want you to remember—always. A man cannot live in a proper way, as God meant him to live, without he live in freedom to work and to worship his God as he himself chooses. Never forget that!

ALEXANDER CRAIGHEAD

[*Solemnly.*] I won't forget it, Father—never.

THIRD MAN

Nor we, Parson. And over there we'll get a chance at it. There'll be nobody pulling the reins over our backs. It'll be a new life!

Others agree, add their comments. The children begin dancing to Hector's lively fife. From the fringe of the crowd a bagpiper steps forward and begins to play spiritedly. Several young men and women emerge, forefront, and begin dancing the Highland Fling. One of the women does a solo dance and as she finishes a young man does the Sword Dance. As the dancers perform the crowd claps hands in time and frequently add their enthusiastic "Och! Och!" The light slowly fades.

SCENE III

The stage is dark; the light comes up quickly on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

The ship bringing the Craigheads and their neighbors to America landed at Boston in October, 1714. The Craighead family first lived at Freetown, Massachusetts, a community appropriately named as a settling place for Scotch Irish Presbyterians. But in 1723 they moved

to New Jersey, and then to Delaware. Ten years later they went to Pennsylvania, where Preacher Craighead was a member of the Synod of Philadelphia and the Presbytery of Donegal.

The next year—in 1734—Alexander Craighead, now 27 years old, was licensed as a minister. Following his ordination a year later he was called to the pastorate of Middle Octarara Presbyterian Church in Lancaster County. But he did not limit his preaching to his own pulpit; sometimes he would journey westward to take the gospel into the back country. And in 1739, the year the elder Craighead died, he joined the eminent revivalist George Whitefield in a series of preaching missions.

This quickly led him into trouble with his synod, which passed a resolution forbidding its members without presbytery's permission to preach beyond the bounds of their own congregations. But this resolution did not deter the independent-minded preacher. He continued preaching to other congregations, and soon complaints were made and he was cited to appear before the presbytery and answer charges.

Craighead appeared, but refused to apologize or accede to presbytery's orders, and was suspended, with the provision that he would be reinstated should he "write to any member signifying his penitential Sorrow and Concern" for his disregard of the Presbytery's orders. This he did not do, and in 1741 he and other revivalist ministers formed two new Presbyteries; he became a member of the Presbytery of Londonderry. Already the young minister was beginning to reveal the bold spirit that a quarter of a century later would identify him to subsequent admiring generations as one

of the immortal fathers of American religious and political independence.

But Alexander Craighead's battle would not be concluded in Lancaster County. He would bring it southward. In the back country of Carolina, a vast area that soon after his coming would be cut off from Anson and named Mecklenburg, he would quickly gain the support of a stout-hearted citizenship. This great region in Craighead's youth was a wilderness inhabited by the native Red man—along the big river the Catawbas and farther west in the high mountains the Cherokees.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk and comes up slowly on the stage, center and right, revealing a clearing at the edge of an Indian village. The side of a cabin, with animal skins hung on it to dry, can be seen through the trees and undergrowth. From this cabin a withered old Indian, supported by a youth, advances slowly into the clearing, forestage. A third Indian, carrying a tall earthen pot over which a deerskin has been stretched, follows them. The old Indian squats, while the one with the drum kneels before it, and with a short stick begins to beat a rhythmical call. From all sides Indians come quickly into the clearing—grown-ups and children—and assemble about the venerable one, who is now assisted to his feet by the youth.

STATED CLERK

[*In darkness.*] The warming winds of spring have returned, bringing again the season for the Indians to begin planting their crops—corn, beans, peas, squash,

melons. But who will name the day for the ceremonial of preparing the soil and sowing the seed?

This is the task and the honored privilege of the tribe's Old Beloved Man, who has now brought his people together to hear his proclamation.

The Stated Clerk remains in darkness as he reads, and the light continues on the Indians assembled about the Old Beloved Man. The action is largely pantomime.

The Indians customarily waited until wild berries had ripened, so that the planted seeds less likely would be disturbed by the birds, and now the berries are ripe.

Two Indian maidens, each holding a flat earthern vessel filled with berries, advance and present them to the Old Beloved Man, who carefully examines them and then places them on the ground before him, as the maidens retire.

But the Old Beloved Man must also examine the sky to see if the signs are propitious.

The Old Beloved Man turns his face upward to study the sky in the east, the south, the west, and the north.

and the earth beneath his feet to discover if the warming soil is ready to welcome the seed.

He prostrates himself face downward, twists his head to listen, first with his left ear pressed against the ground and then the right, and slowly he arises.

Now having learned their secrets from the sky and the earth, reverently he raises his eyes and calls upon Wariwe, the Man Above of the Catawbas, who dwells a long day's journeying beyond the overturned great

bowl of the heavens, to confirm the rightness of his findings.

His face turned upward again, his arms extended straight above his head in imploring gesture, the Old Beloved Man stands motionless, and then his arms fall and with serious mien he surveys his silent people. Slowly he raises his right arm and sweeps it in an arc from east to west.

His people understand. Tomorrow—one journeying of the sun across the skies—he has appointed for the beginning of the spring planting.

The light fades, the stage is dark, and then the light comes up slowly on the same scene, though the people are gone. As the light strengthens, a brave enters, mounts a platform of saplings lashed together. Turning in one direction and then the other, the Indian in shrill whoops and guttural growls signals the people to assemble.

STATED CLERK

[*Still in darkness.*] The sun is rising, the day of planting dawns, the new year advances. "Arise Catawbas!" proclaims the tribe's crier.

CRIER

Sundawi widabui mbosere. Yawa widabui mbuseri. Kus ha ishtuntari. Yawa kus ha ishturi. Sunda ducthari. Yawa dudshore. Yab ayo mbarire. Minase kunsasere.

STATED CLERK

"You shot a deer yesterday," he says. "You will shoot a deer tomorrow. This Indian corn has been husked.

This Indian corn will be husked tomorrow. I ate yesterday. I will eat tomorrow. A clear day appears. I stop talking."

The Indians, carrying crude tools, have been assembling from all sides. Now, as the crier's impassioned oratory is ended, one of the men points toward right and starts in that direction. With the drummer and the crier, who has jumped down from the stand following, the workers move offstage to the rhythmic beating of the drum. On right stage they stop, begin breaking the soil, as the drummer crouches beside drum and beats a lively tattoo. Now the drummer rises and with exaggerated gestures begins telling a Catawba folklore story to entertain the workers. All the while Indian children play about the edge of the clearing.

DRUMMER

Istc'nA udniyA owehe himusnErahA tEranko isahe witcaurere depe hatkuhA hakutel. UniAt iswa hiak yeyesebe korandakimAtu yepA ituskeheka'e tcok inEhe. Onikan huka't i'nikimuntut hi'yepaehahe.

STATED CLERK

He has just told them the story of how the ghosts were heard dancing.

"My mother told me," he has said in the Catawba language, "that she and my father were standing outside the door one evening just after sunset. And from across the river, where there used to be an ancient Indian village, they could hear somebody drumming very hard (and the people dancing and singing). But there was

nobody over there (where all the noise came from)."

So they prepare the soil and sow the seeds. And when the work in one field is done, they move to another.

The light fades, comes up on Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

The planting done, the men are free to return to their hunting or warring. But first the village must celebrate with singing and dancing.

The light fades on Stated Clerk.

SCENE IV

A soft, slightly reddish light comes up on the clearing, forestage and center, and a low brushwood fire further illumines dancing figures of Indian men and women, who keep time in their lively circling to the drummer's thumping. As the fire dies, the stage darkens to blackness and the music ceases. Now the light comes up brightly on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

Thus lived, and fought, and worked and played those first residents of the great back country that later was to be called Mecklenburg. Meanwhile ships coming into the ports of Boston and New York and Philadelphia and Charleston were bringing immigrants from the old lands, and these immigrants were pushing outward from the coastal regions into the trackless, uncharted wilderness. Westward and upward from Charleston and the

Low Country, southward from Pennsylvania and Maryland, through the great valley of Virginia, into the lands of the Pee Dee and the Yadkin and the Catawba trudged staunch Presbyterians with their families.

The light goes out on Stated Clerk.

SCENE V

The light comes up on forestage and stage right to spot a pioneer settler walking beside his horse, which slowly pulls a two-wheeled cart, with a woman seated in front and from which protrude the heads of several small children. A tall slim boy walks behind the cart as it moves across to disappear in darkness at the left.

The spot next picks up a man leading a horse from left deep stage toward right forestage. On the horse sits a woman, holding an infant warmly wrapped. A little girl sits in front of her and a small boy behind her. They disappear at right.

STATED CLERK

[*In darkness, light still on stage.*] Steadily, in lengthening and thickening streams they came—southward, northward, westward—some horseback, some afoot, some riding in their tough two-wheeled carts and wagons, many of them bearing few possessions beyond stout hearts and great courage and simple abiding strong faith.

As he begins speaking, another group advances from right, forestage. It is led by two riders, one behind the other. A big covered cart pulled by two horses follows. Two women and several children ride in the jostling vehicle, with rude household furnishings packed about them. A squealing pig is in the slatted crate tied on the back of the cart. Two boys follow on mules, and a third boy leads a cow. A dog trots behind the wagon, and another dog and several boys walk behind the cow. As the group moves slowly across the stage, the light fades and comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

So they came into Mecklenburg in the middle years of the eighteenth century, and they raised their sturdy log houses of peeled and hewn pine or oak or hickory or ash, and burned over the wide grasslands and chopped out clearings, and planted crops and reaped harvests, and reared families. They were hardy souls, those invaders of the wilderness who came seeking a better chance for themselves and their children in an undisturbed free land, a land in which they could dream and work to build their dreams, where they could live their own lives. For always in the forefront of their dreaming, always uppermost in their striving was their determination to live and work and love and worship in freedom.

But until the eighteenth century was half ended, despite their pleas to the Old Side Synod of Philadelphia and the New Side Synod of New York to send them preachers, not a minister had come into the back coun-

try to bring to these people the strengthening sustenance of the gospel.

And then one day a stranger tied his horse at the hitching rack of the ordinary operated in the Centre community a few miles northwest of the present Davidson College by George Davidson, who a few years before had come south from Lancaster County in Pennsylvania.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk.

SCENE VI

The light comes up on George Davidson's ordinary, a log structure, center, with side toward audience cut away to reveal interior. Fire burns in fireplace, left. A rude bar is at right, a table in center. Sprawled on chair beside table, a man dawdles with a fife. Behind bar stands a man with apron about his middle. Woman with cap on her head is sweeping hearth with old-field straw broom.

Outside, forestage right, a man dismounts from lathered horse and hooks bridle rein over peg in the rack, walks toward ordinary.

MAN WITH FIFE

[*To other man.*] Neill, you got company.

NEILL

[*Who can't yet see stranger.*] What's he look like, Hector?

HECTOR

Tall, scrawny-like. Looks like a trader headed for the Catawba's town, except he ain't got no pack-horse.

WOMAN

[*Peeping.*] Looks hungry, too. And likely got little money.

The stranger enters, bows politely, and the three bow to him.

STRANGER

Good day, Ma'am, gentlemen.

HECTOR

[*Getting up.*] Good day to ye, sir.

NEILL

Likewise. Can I serve ye, sir?

STRANGER

Yes, I trust you can minister to the physical man, and his beast. I need refreshment, and my horse likewise needs water and feed. We've come a long way today —from halfway this side of Salisbury.

NEILL

We can see to your needs stranger. [*To small boy, who has just entered from rear.*] William Lee, whilst I'm rustling up some vittles for this gentleman, run out, will ye, and look after his horse?

BOY

[*Nods to Neil, turns to stranger.*] Out at the hitching rack, sir?

STRANGER

Yes, son, and I'll thank you greatly to feed him and give him some water. I've been pushing him hard today. You're a likely looking lad. What might your name be, son?

BOY

William Lee Davidson, sir.

STRANGER

Davidson? Could it be that George Davidson's your father?

BOY

Yes, sir, he is.

STRANGER

[*Beaming.*] I know him well. Used to know him in Pennsylvania.

NEILL

His daddy owns this ordinary, mister. He's a good man.

STRANGER

Yes, I agree, he is. And did you likewise come from Pennsylvania, sir?

NEILL

That's right. Pretty nigh ever'body in these parts is from Pennsylvania.

The boy, meanwhile, has gone to hitching rack. He leads horse off, right and rear.

STRANGER

I thought so. I ought to feel at home in this region. I must know many of the settlers. [*He backs up to the fire, lifts his long coattails.*] You say you've got something for me to eat?

NEILL

I've got some thick soup I can give ye a'ready. It's still hot. [*He motions with his head.*] If ye wish to wash up from the riding, there's a basin and water and a towel in the room back there. You'll see 'em.

STRANGER

Thank you. That will refresh me. [*He goes out through rear door. Neill takes wooden bowl from shelf behind bar, goes to fireplace and bending down, removes lid from iron pot. Then with a gourd dipper hanging beside the fireplace he fills bowl with soup from pot, and places it on the table, as the stranger returns.*]

NEILL

Set there at the table, mister. I got your soup acoolin'.

WOMAN

[*Going toward rear door, and returning to address Neill.*] I'll go see to the beds. [*To the stranger.*] Would ye be stayin' for the night, sir?

STRANGER

[*Looking up from soup, which he has been blowing.*] I hardly think so, ma'am, though it may be that I shall have to avail myself of your hospitality.

WOMAN

Well, the room'll be ready should ye decide to stay. [*She goes out rear.*]

STRANGER

[*Sniffing.*] This soup smells mighty good.

NEILL

It's fillin' to an empty stomach. Fall to, mister, whilst I'm rustlin' ye up something that'll stay with ye longer.

The stranger bows his head, and the two men see his lips moving. Then he opens his eyes and begins to eat.

STRANGER

Hmmnn! It tastes as good as it smells, too! But it's an unusual taste to me it has, at any rate. What are you going to give me to follow it? I'll confess I'm pretty hungry.

NEILL

There's some greens, mister, and corn mush—it's still warm—and gravy and roast, and—

STRANGER

[*Interrupting.*] Roast! Now that sounds good. Beef roast, I presume.

NEILL

No, mister, not beef. Bear meat.

STRANGER

[*Lowering his spoon.*] Bear meat? I've always heard it was mighty strong. I don't believe I'd like—

NEILL

[*Laughing, and interrupting.*] Mister, you've just about et up a big bowl of bear soup!

STRANGER

[*Startled.*] Is this bear soup? [*He smiles ruefully.*] I had no idea it was that. But I'll have to say again it's mighty good. [*Smiles more lightly.*] You might cut me off a small slice of bear roast and I'll try it.

HECTOR

[*Who from the fireplace has been studying the stranger.*] Mister, seems like I ought to know you. I must'a' seen ye somewheres some time! Thought maybe ye was one of those Indian traders till just now ye asked the blessing over yo' soup. [*He grins.*] I don't know no Indian trader'd do that.

STRANGER

No, I'm not an Indian trader. I'm a minister—a Presbyterian preacher of the gospel. The name's John Thomson.

NEILL

[*At the hearth spooning up the greens and corn mush.*] A Presbyterian preacher! [*He turns about, excited.*] Parson, as best I ken, ye're the first preacher of our faith and order—likely the first of any kind—that's ever come into this country 'round here. John Thomson, ye say? [*He crinkles his forehead in concentration.*] Could it be that ye, like the rest o' us in these parts, came over to America from Ireland after our forefathers had transplanted there from Scotland?

THOMSON

Yes, I came over from Ireland some thirty-five years ago; it was in 1715, in fact.

HECTOR

[*Greatly interested.*] My name's McElrath, Hector McElrath, Parson. And this [*Pointing.*] is Neill Osborne. We came over the year before you did—that was 'fourteen—with Preacher Thomas Craighead and those he fetched. Landed at Boston that October.

THOMSON

Were you a member of Pastor Craighead's congregation in County Donegal? I used to visit him there. I remember one night in the spring of 'fourteen a group of his people had assembled at the well in the village square, and after lively discussion they agreed that the thing to do was to emigrate to America.

HECTOR

[*Beaming.*] I knew I'd seen you before, Parson. I was right there that night. In fact, I had this old fife out there with me. [*He pats the fife affectionately.*] You came out to the well with Preacher Holmes, Mr. Craighead's brother-in-law. You were a young preacher then; it's been a long time, though you haven't changed so much. Yes, sir, it's been thirty-seven years since I saw you.

THOMSON

I thought to myself that you looked familiar to me, Brother McElrath. Yes, it's been a long time since we left County Donegal, and each of us has made a far

journey. By the way, [*With interest mounting.*] I suspect you brethren can give me the information I need. I'm trying to get to the home of my daughter, which can't be far from here, if I've been directed aright. She's Mistress Elizabeth Baker, the wife of Samuel Baker. Would you gentlemen be acquainted with them?

He looks toward Hector, and then Neill, who is now placing his meal before him.

HECTOR

Ever'body 'round here knows Sam Baker as an upstanding man, and his wife's well liked too. Their home's not far from here—just a jump and a loud holler. You just visiting them, or maybe moving down to live in these parts?

THOMSON

Visiting, I suppose, though our Synod of Philadelphia did instruct me to correspond with the people here in the back country of North Carolina who earlier had requested Synod to take into consideration their destitute condition [*He lifts a forkful of bear meat toward his mouth, holds it.*] with the purpose in mind, of course, of bringing the gospel to them. And likewise George Davidson and others hereabouts have urged me to come down and minister to them.

NEILL

I was just thinking, Parson, how warming it would be to us people back here in the wilderness country to sit and listen once more to the preaching of good Presbyterian doctrine out of the mouth of a good Scotsman preacher. Do you aim to do any preaching whilst you're here, sir?

THOMSON

Yes, likely. [*Smiling.*] If I get any invitations.

HECTOR

Ye'll not lack for invitations, I'll promise ye. It's nae doubt ye'll be asked mony's the time—all the way from Cathey's Meeting House this side o' Salisbury—

THOMSON

I spent last night in that community.

HECTOR

Well, sir, they'll be awantin' ye to preach for them there. And likewise them down the river in the Hopewell region and farther down at Steele Creek and acrost at Sugaw Creek and Rocky River—[*He pauses, for little William Lee Davidson enters through the rear door, and he addresses the boy.*] William Lee, run over to yo' house and tell yo' daddy that there's a Presbyterian preacher over here—one o' his friends—that's come south from the same country we came from up in Pennsylvania. Yo' daddy'll sure be glad to see him!

The boy nods, goes out rear door.

THOMSON

There must be many of our faith and order in these parts, Brother McElrath.

HECTOR

Presbyterians! Why, Parson, they ain't nothin' but Presbyterians over in this side. They's some Lutherans t'other side o' Rocky River, but 'round here, as the old fellow says, Presbyterians and wild onions is about to take the country.

NEILL

And, Parson, meaning no disrespect, as the old fellow says, we ain't found but one way o' gettin' rid o' them wild onions.

THOMSON

[*Puzzled.*] How's that?

NEILL

Tell him, Hector.

HECTOR

[*Grinning.*] They do say, sir, that that one sure way o' gettin' rid o' wild onions is by pouring liquor on 'em.

THOMSON

You mean, I suppose, that the whiskey burns them up.

HECTOR

Oh, no, sir. It ain't that way you kill 'em. You see, after we pour liquor on 'em, these here Scotch Irish Presbyterians comes along and eats 'em up, tops and all!

He slaps his leg with his palm and guffaws. Thomson and Neil laugh, and the preacher lowers his fork to speak.

THOMSON

I have an idea, Brother, that those Lutherans and Church of England folks, if there are any around these parts, would eat their share of whiskey-flavored wild onions too.

HECTOR

[*Laughing again.*] You're right, Parson! I'd just as soon risk one as t'other!

The light fades on Davidson's Ordinary.

SCENE VII

The entire stage is dark; the light brightens on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

The Reverend John Thomson, whose wife had died many years before, established his home in the Centre community with his daughter and son-in-law. Tradition relates the story that they had a cabin built for him near their own, where when he wished he could be alone to meditate, study, pray, and prepare sermons, for very soon after arriving at the Bakers' he was importuned to preach to brethren hungry for the Word.

He preached many sermons up and down the Catawba. There is good reason to believe that one of these places was beneath a great tree that stood until a few years ago beside the railroad in the southern section of Davidson but a few hundred yards from the college. Other traditional sites have been pointed out. It is quite probable that this devout minister lifted his perhaps stentorian and orthodox voice of the Old Side theology in communities well east of the Catawba.

One of the known places where he preached, however, was outdoors at the home of Richard Barry, about a mile north of what later would be historic Hopewell Church. His coming had been heralded, and the people assembled from a wide area. They had come in carts, on horseback, in wagons, on foot, to enjoy a serving of Presbyterian doctrine from the lips of a Presbyterian minister. Now, after an hour and a half of earnest preaching, the preacher has finished his sermon—

Slowly the lights fade on the Stated Clerk and simultaneously come up on the stage, center and right, revealing the Reverend John Thomson standing before a small table on which is an open Bible and at one side a small wooden pail of water, with a short handled gourd beside the pail.

Facing him and obliquely facing the audience is a group of men, women, and children. Some sit on rude chairs and benches, others on the ground. All are intently regarding the preacher, except some of the smaller children, some of whom are asleep and others restless.

THOMSON

Brethren, let us all join now in singing Psalm I, Rous' version. I shall read off the entire Psalm first, and then I shall parcel it out, line by line, and we will sing this great poem song of the ancient Psalmist.

He adjusts his glasses, begins reading.

That man hath perfect blessedness
Who walketh not astray
In counsel of ungodly men
Nor stands in sinners' way;
Nor sitteth in the scorner's chair;
But placeth his delight
Upon God's law and meditates
On His law, day and night.

He shall be like a tree that grows
Near planted by a river,
Which in his season yields his fruit

And his leaf fadeth never;
And all he doth shall prosper well;
The wicked are not so,
But they are like unto the chaff
Which wind drives to and fro.

In judgment therefore shall not stand
Such as ungodly are,
Nor in th' assembly of the just
Shall wicked men appear;
Because the way of godly men
Unto the Lord is known;
Whereas the way of wicked men
Shall quite be overthrown.

Now let us all stand and sing praises to our God.

He lifts his hands, palms up, signaling them to stand. They rise.

That man hath perfect blessedness
Who walketh not astray

The congregation sings the lines, the minister reads the next two, the congregation sings them, he reads the next two, the congregation sings them, and so on, with the minister joining in the singing, until the singing of the Psalm has been completed.

Now let us be dismissed with the benediction.

The people bow their heads, still standing, the minister raises his right hand, lifts his face heavenward.

The love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the peace and communion of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you both now and forever. Amen.

The minister lowers his hand, advances into the midst of the people—who for this scene include members of the choral group—and shakes hands and chats as the light fades on the group and comes up again on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

So this devout man of God, the first to bring the gospel to this vast wilderness region, preached to the people hungry to hear. His preaching radius, tradition says, was twenty miles from his little cabin at Samuel Baker's. That would take him to Cathey's Meeting House, now Thyatira, historic church in Rowan County; Poplar Tent, near the Mecklenburg line in present Cabarrus; Sugaw Creek and perhaps Rocky River; and in a grove at a blacksmith shop which later became the spacious grounds of Charlotte's First Presbyterian Church.

But the Reverend John Thomson was not destined long to raise his voice in this wilderness that was to become an industrial empire. Some two years after he arrived at the home of his daughter he was dead. Tradition says his mourning neighbors cut a hole in the floor of his cabin and buried him there. Tradition further asserts that his strange burial place grew into Baker's graveyard, thought now to be the oldest burying ground in this region. Today no memorial marks the grave of this first voice, this first bearer of the good news to our far spreading ancient land.

(PHOTOS BY JERRE C. WHITSETT, WHITSETT STUDIO)

THE WILDERNESS BECAME SETTLED, AND THE MAN OF GOD LED THE WAY.

VILLAGE IN COUNTY DONEGAL, IRELAND. THE YEAR—1714.

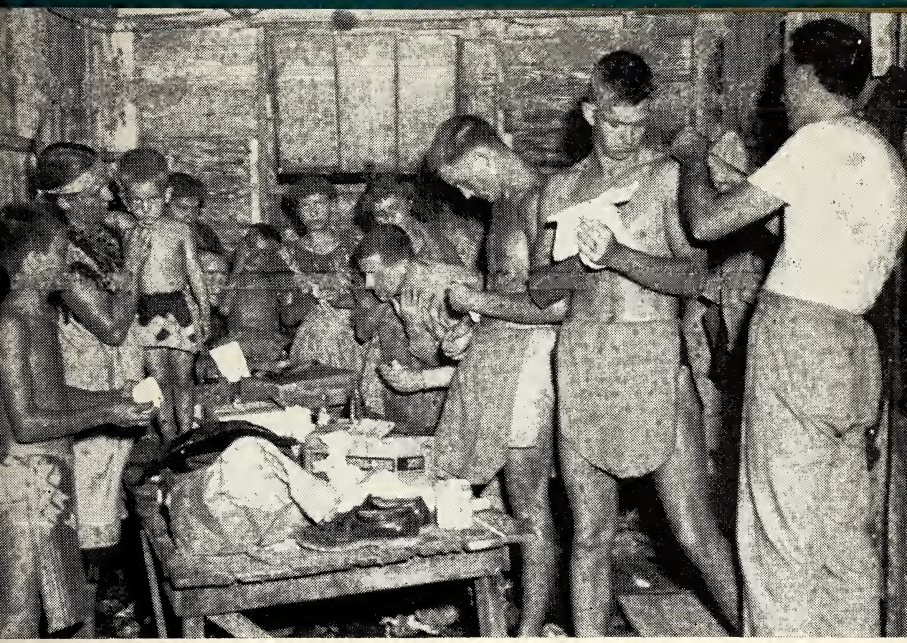
BRAWNY LADS AND THEIR LASSIES DANCE ON THE VILLAGE GREEN.

"IF PRINCES EXCEED THEIR BOUNDS, . . . THEY MAY BE RESISTED BY FORCE . . . "

"WE . . . CANNOT LIVE UNDER TYRANNY. WE WILL NOT SO LIVE!"

UNWELCOME "VISITORS" DESPOILED THE MECKLENBURGERS.

"LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED; YE BELIEVE IN GOD . . . "



"INDIANS" HAD TO ACQUIRE THE PROPER HUE.

THE SPIRIT, AND LOOK, OF OLD MECKLENBURG BLOSSOMED AGAIN.

IMPROMPTU MEETINGS IRONED OUT DIFFICULTIES.

THE CAST ALONE WOULD HAVE FILLED A SMALL AUDITORIUM

THE PRODUCTION BENEFITTED FROM GOOD MUSICAL DIRECTION AND PERFORMANCE.

BEING AN ACTOR WORKS UP AN APPETITE.

SETS, SCRIPT, PLANNING, DIRECTION, THEN LIGHTS,
SOUND AND—CURTAIN TIME!

THE GRANDSTAND WAS PACKED EVERY NIGHT.

SCENE VIII

The light comes up on stage right and center, as a young man in clerical dress rides horseback from out of darkness far right to cross stage slowly and disappear at left, rear.

STATED CLERK

[*In darkness.*] But two years after they laid the tired frame of John Thomson to its long rest in the soil of the Centre community another missionary came riding into the province of North Carolina.

Hugh McAden, born in Pennsylvania of humble Scotch Irish parents, had been graduated from the College of New Jersey, now Princeton, and had been licensed the same year by New Castle Presbytery and instructed to make a missionary tour of North Carolina. In the Valley of Virginia he had learned of the disastrous defeat of General Braddock's forces by the French and Indians near the present Pittsburgh, and quickly he had ridden eastward. But on entering North Carolina the young preacher had swung south and west to reach the country between the Yadkin and the Catawba. On October 12, he recorded in his diary, he reached Rocky River and a week later Sugaw Creek, where he preached, he commented, to "some pretty serious judicious people —may the Lord grant His blessing . . . "

The young minister's diary supports, therefore, the belief that at Rocky River and Sugaw Creek two hundred years ago this year Hugh McAden was preaching to congregations already organized, though at that time they perhaps had not erected their houses of worship.

Slowly the light fades on the entire stage.

SCENE IX

STATED CLERK

But soon a more eloquent, a more persuasive, a more compelling voice would be heard in the back country of Carolina—the voice of Alexander Craighead.

This uncompromising adherent of New Side Presbyterianism, this determined advocate of religious and civil liberty had been finding it increasingly difficult to get along with either the ecclesiastcal authorities or the representatives of His Majesty's government. In Pennsylvania he had authorized a paper that had greatly disturbed the Governor of that province. This document when laid before the Synod of Philadelphia had been described by that sedate body as "full of treason, sedition, and distraction, and grievous perverting of the sacred oracles to the ruin of all societies and good government," and the Synod had asserted further that "we hereby unanimously, with the greatest sincerity, declare that we detest this paper, and with it all principles and practices that . . . tend to foment or encourage sedition or dissastifaction with the civil government that we are now under, or rebellion, treason or anything that is disloyal." The indignant brethren even declared that the Reverend Mr. Craighead "hath been no member of our society for some time past, nor do we acknowledge him as such, though we cannot but heartily lament that any man that was ever called a Presbyterian should be guilty of what is in this paper . . . "

So Alexander Craighead, chafing under what he considered restraint and narrowness of his brethren, had moved southward to settle on the Cowpasture River in

the Valley of Virginia. He was living there when Braddock's defeat on July 9, 1755, laid the frontiers open to the vengeance of the Indians. In many a lonesome clearing a settler's cabin blazed; some families escaped, many were slain by the savage Red men.

The Stated Clerk is silent, and the light fades on him as the entire set is in darkness. And then, off left and deep center, fast mounting flames reveal burning cabins from which people can be seen fleeing into the night, with Indians, their tomahawks swinging, in pursuit. The screams of the settlers and the maddened yelpings of the savages come up strong and die away as the flames quickly subside. The light comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

Among those who escaped with their lives—though with little else—were Preacher Craighead and his family. "As we went out one door," a daughter of the minister was to declare later, "the Indians came in at the other."

In late January of 1758 Reverend Mr. Craighead on instructions of his Presbytery of Hanover made a missionary journey into North Carolina. One of the churches visited was Rocky River. Evidently those sturdy Scotch Irish early Mecklenburgers were impressed with the bold and independent minded preacher and he must have thought well of them, for in April the Presbytery was handed a call from Rocky River, "requesting that Mr. Craighead might take the pastoral care" of that congregation. The Presbytery consented "heartily," glad perhaps to see the straight talking New Sider removed

to the back country of Carolina, and Mr. Craighead with equal delight, it appears, accepted the call.

The Presbytery assigned a minister to preside at the installation of Mr. Craighead but he was unable to be present and it was not until early November that the Reverend William Richardson, a missionary on his way to preach to the Cherokee Indians, duly installed the pastor of Rocky River and Sugaw Creek churches. Tradition says he was installed on a Sunday morning at Rocky River and that afternoon at Sugaw Creek, but Richardson's diary notes that the service was on Monday, November 6, 1758.

Alexander Craighead was the first pastor to settle in the vast region between the Yadkin and Catawba. From his early days in Mecklenburg he was the leader, the inspiration, the flaming spirit of the people, a people who shared his determination to be free. And quickly on the rim of his congregations at Rocky River and Sugaw Creek other congregations organized—Steele Creek, Hopewell, Centre, Poplar Tent, and Providence. Thus were born in those long gone fateful days the seven pioneer Presbyterian churches of Mecklenburg and a little later the eighth, Philadelphia.

The light pales and fades out on the Stated Clerk.

SCENE X

The light comes up brightly on the interior of Sugaw Creek Church, a high hewn log structure whose side toward the audience has been cut away. Rev. Alexander Craighead, the pastor,

in his late fifties, is standing in pulpit, left, and the congregation faces him, the men on the right side, the women on the left, next the audience, as they sit on rough wooden benches. Light from lamps concealed from the audience floods the faces of the minister and the worshippers, who are sitting in rapt attention. Rev. Mr. Craighead has just finished his sermon.

CRAIGHEAD

Now let us join in singing to the praise of Almighty God Psalm 22, long meter.

"Earth's utmost bounds shall hear and turn;
All tribes and realms Thy worship learn;
For God the Lord all empire owns,
And rules above all earthly thrones."

He pauses and his eyes sweep the congregation.

"For God the Lord all empire owns,
And rules above all earthly thrones."

For a moment he is silent as he studies his flock.

Before we sing, my dear friends, let us consider what this great Psalm says, what it means to us of this modern day. Is it not a song heralding the coming triumph of the gospel, and is it not right and proper and foreordained and predestined that the gospel should triumph in all the world, since "God the Lord all empire owns, and rules above all earthly thrones?"

God rules above all earthly thrones. Remember this, my beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. God rules

by His own divine right, but men rule only through the will of them they rule. There is no divine right of kings. Recall the words of the immortal John Knox: "If princes exceed their bounds they may be resisted by force."

He pauses again, then speaks earnestly.

Remember in these troublous days that only God has complete rule. Men who do not rule aright, kings and parliaments who flout the rights and interests of their subjects, must be resisted!

I am an old man. More than fifty years ago as a boy of seven I came with my father to this new land. We came that we might be free to live our lives as we willed them—to earn a living by the sweat of our brows and to worship God in our own way. Many of you and your fathers came likewise from across the sea seeking the same things. We have not yet achieved the complete freedom we sought, and even in these recent days the Crown and prelacy are challenging us with renewed spirit.

He raises his arm, gestures with emphasis.

But we will not be enslaved, my beloved friends. We will yet be free. Remember that, my brethren. Take strength in the Lord, and let us find courage to renew the struggle begun long years ago in old Ireland. Resist those who would enslave you. Remember that you are brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ and with Him sons of the eternal God, the God who all empire owns, who rules above all earthly thrones.

He signals to congregation to rise.

Now let us sing Psalm 22.

The leader advances to front, lifts tuning fork, strikes it, and the congregation, without accompaniment, sings:

Earth's utmost bounds shall hear and turn;
All tribes and realms Thy worship learn;
For God the Lord all empire owns,
And rules above all earthly thrones.

For God the Lord all empire owns,
And rules above all earthly thrones.

All rich ones on the earth shall eat,
And bowing worship at His feet,
And all who to the dust descend;
None can his soul from death defend.

For God the Lord all empire owns,
And rules above all earthly thrones.

A seed shall rise to serve the Lord,
That race as His He shall regard;
They'll come and tell to sire and son
The righteous deeds the Lord hath done.

For God the Lord all empire owns,
And rules above all earthly thrones.

As the song ends the lights fade and the stage is in darkness. The lights come up on the audience, and the orchestra and organ play a short medley of spirited songs of the church.

END OF ACT I
INTERMISSION
(10 minutes)

Act II

SCENE I

As the people settle in their seats for the beginning of Act II the stage is in darkness. The lights go out on the audience and come up dimly on the ordinary at Phifer's Mill at Rocky River, slightly left, forestage. Horses are tied at the hitching rack, farther left. Concealed bright lights inside the ordinary reveal a man behind the counter-bar and three young men lounging on the stools in front of the counter. The entire front of the log structure has been cut away to give the audience a full view of the interior. The four men are talking as three other men come around from rear, right, and enter. They are dressed in rough frontier garb. The three nod to the loungers, walk up to the bar. One of them addresses the man behind it.

MAN

Howdy, neebor. This here yore place?

PROPRIETOR

Well, I run it for the man that owns it. What can I do for you?

MAN

You got any West Indian rum, or maybe a pot o' stewed wine with a little claret or Madeira in it, and good and hot?

PROPRIETOR

[*Grinning.*] Got 'em both, and other stuff besides.

MAN

Neebor, that sounds good to me. [*He turns to his companions.*] Don't it, boys? [*They nod, grinning.*]

And something to eat, mister. We're tard and hongry. Man, I feel like I could eat a whole roasted ox myself.

PROPRIETOR

Must 'a' come a pretty fur piece.

SECOND MAN

You're right, mister. From t'other side o' Charlottetown today a'ready.

PROPRIETOR

'D you walk? I ain't heard no hosses.

FIRST MAN

[*Laughing.*] No, but we're tarder'n if'n we had 'a' walked. Them waggins is rough ridin'.

PROPRIETOR

Waggins?

MAN

[*Nodding out right.*] They's out there behind. There's some other fellows out there with 'em. They'll eat when we git through.

ONE OF LOUNGERS

Must have some right smart valuable stuff on them waggins, mister, seein' as it has to be guarded thataway.

THIRD MAN

It's come all the way from Charleston. If you just knowed what we was takin' Governor Tryon—

FIRST MAN

[*Interrupting with a scowl.*] Not so fast, Isaac! You talk too much. Didn't Sheriff Mose say to mind our tongues?

SECOND MAN

He's right, Isaac. We could lose that stuff mighty quick-like.

PROPRIETOR

Stuff for Bill Tryon, d'ye say?

FIRST MAN

Well, it ain't really for the Governor; it's for General Hugh Waddell over 'bout Salisbury. But, say, mister, how 'bout rustling us up some o' that good hot stewed wine, so's we can git back to them waggins and let them other fellows wet their whistles.

The proprietor sets three mugs before them and they drink with gusto, smacking their lips, and when they have finished, wiping them with the backs of their hands.

Now, mister, [*Setting down the mug.*] we'll git back to the waggins and let those fellows come have a swig. And whilst they're drinkin' you can be rustlin' us all up something to eat.

The three go out.

FIRST LOUNGER

Waggins loaded with stuff for old Hugh Waddell. Can't be but one thing—powder and shot for him to use agin the Regerlators!

SECOND LOUNGER

You're right, I'm bound, Josh. And I'd ruther by a long shot see it used agin Tryon his ownself. Them Regerlators maybe is taking the law into their own hands, but they got a right to protect theirselves. Old Tryon ain't doin' it. He thinks he's the King.

THIRD LOUNGER

Nor's the King protectin' them, or us over here in Mecklenburg. Times is gittin' worse instead o' better. I hope them Regerlators puts it over on old Bill Tryon!

PROPRIETOR

I do too, boys. But trouble is, they's not organized. They's just a mob, with no leader. They's nobody to speak for 'em proper like. If'n they had a leader, somebody who could talk straight to old Tryon—

FIRST LOUNGER

Like Preacher Craighead could 'a' done! Man, he'd 'a' throwed it right in old Tryon's teeth.

SECOND LOUNGER

Yes, he could 'a' done it, all right, but he's been dead five years. There ain't nobody—

FIRST LOUNGER

[*With warmth.*] He's dead, all right, but we ain't forgot what he preached. He told us we had a right to

worship as we wanted to and a right to our own government as free men. Aint that so? I was just a boy, but I well mind hearing him say them very words at Sugaw Creek and Rocky River both.

PROPRIETOR

But Tryon's the Governor, boys, under the King. He's got the authority. He's got the soldiers, too.

FIRST LOUNGER

Maybe so. [*Heatedly.*] But he aint got the right to do like he's doin'. Nor's old George hisself got the right to. "If princes exceed their bounds, then they may be resisted by force." I mind hearin' Preacher Craighead sayin' them very words. And the folks agreed with him, too. I'll tell you one thing: old Tryon and Hugh Waddell too, better stay out o' Mecklenburg!

SECOND LOUNGER

Not so loud, Josh. Them other ones might be comin' for their grog. But when the time's right[*He looks around, lowers his voice.*] we'd better have a look at them waggins!

The light fades and the entire stage is in darkness.

STATED CLERK

[*In darkness.*] That night the wagoners at Phifer's Mill had visitors.

For an instant there is silence and complete darkness. Then from far right can be heard horses coming along the road. They stop. Then, in a loud whisper, a man speaks.

MAN

Just drop the reins over the pegs, boys. We may have to get away in a hurry.

Silence a moment.

Let's git over to them waggins, and be careful. We don't want nobody to git hurt.

Sound of men walking stealthily.

SLEEPY VOICE

Jake, that you? What you doin' over there? [*More awake.*] Say, what's ahappenin' nohow? Mister, what are ye ahuntin' for in that there waggin? You'd better git—

MAN

You'd better git quiet your ownself if'n ye don't want a slug o' hot lead through you. [*To his companions.*] Hey, boys; it's powder and flints, all right, and blankets and stuff. Git it all out the waggins and pile the powder over here. 'Roust all them wagginers out and stand 'em over there. We'll burn up the blankets; they won't never warm no backs o' old Bill Tryon's soldiers.

For a moment there is a commotion in the darkness as they begin carrying out his orders.

Now, set fire to the pile o' blankets. Ye got the gunpowder piled over there?

ONE OF HIS MEN

All set, Josh, ready to let 'er blow.

MAN

Careful 'bout calling names, I told ye!

One of his men has lighted the supplies taken from the wagons, and the blaze illumines wagons, rear, and a group of men standing near them and a man in front holding a rifle on them.

WAGGONER

Wait till old Bill Tryon hears about this! Ye'll all string for it! Blacked yo' faces, did ye, to fool somebody! Well, ye ain't niggers nor Indians neither! And ye'll be found out, I'm atellin' ye!

MAN WITH RIFLE

Shut up, you!

FIRST MAN

All right, boys, lay a powder trail to the pile.

He waits as one of his men sprinkles a thin line of powder to the pile.

Now, all you fokes stand back. She's agoin' to blow!

To the man, who has picked up a scrap from the blazing blankets and is holding it in readiness.

Light her, and git for yo' hosses, men!

The man bends down, holds flame to powder trail; it ignites, and he races away behind the others. The flame runs along the trail, reaches the pile, and there is a tremendous explosion.

SCENE II

As the fire from the burning supplies flickers low and goes out, the light comes up on the Stated Clerk. The stage is now in darkness.

STATED CLERK

So on a dark night at Phifer's Mill near the present Concord, nine Rocky River boys, aflame with the spirit of old Pastor Alexander Craighead, lighted a fire that shortly would blaze into a fierce and determined fight for freedom.

But a decade would pass before independence, religious and civil, would be won by the colonies. Over on Alamance the Regulators, undisciplined and ill led, would be routed by an arrogant Tryon who mercilessly would hang several of their leaders, only to infuriate all the more the determined settlers of back country Carolina.

For the spirit of Alexander Craighead rode the narrow trails and walked the forest paths and sat with his people before their blazing fireplaces and admonished them never to yield to tyranny; it stood beside brother ministers in their rude log houses of worship and strengthened them to stiffen the wills of their flocks to be free; it sat at the elbows of frock-coated teachers in old-field schoolhouses, for already in this region there were several academies—one founded at Sugaw Creek and taught by Craighead himself—in which Presbyterian pedagogues sought with patience, persuasion, prayer, perspiration, and frequently and well applied hickory switches to see realized a cardinal Presbyterian determination—to have an educated ministry leading an edu-

cated God-fearing, God-loving citizenship possessing a land free of religious and political dictatorship.

Four years after the death of Pastor Craighead the Presbyterians in Mecklenburg persuaded Governor Tryon to recommend to the Colonial Assembly that it establish "a public seminary in some part of the back country of this Colony for the education of youth." The Assembly complied on January 15, 1771, by incorporating Queens Museum in the crossroads village of Charlottetown and levying for its support a tax of "six pence per gallon on all rum brought into and disposed of in Mecklenburg County for ten years following the passage of this act."

North Carolina's first college was a log structure on newly named Tryon Street a short way south of the little court house that sat in the intersection of the two straggling red roads. It was on the site of the recently built Jefferson Standard Building at East Third and South Tryon Streets. Between it and the Court House was Joe Nicholson's Tavern, where doubtless many of its students spent too much time.

But in April of the next year King George refused to approve the act chartering Queens Museum because its trustees were Presbyterian dissenters. This further alienated the Mecklenburgers, who continued to operate the school without a charter until 1777, when it was chartered by the Assembly under the name of Liberty Hall. Three years later the school was being used as a hospital for the invading British soldiers and in 1784 it was chartered anew and moved to Salisbury.

During its short life, however, the institution had attracted young men from a wide region, including perhaps even for a short while an obstreperous red-head named Andrew Jackson.

In the years following Pastor Craighead's death, conditions in the colonies progressively grew worse. From New England southward men fumed and chafed under the flagrant injustices of the British Crown and his colonial representatives. In Mecklenburg many began openly to express their anger. But what would they do?

Late in the spring of 1775 a group of leaders, Presbyterian ruling elders perhaps all of them, met at Alexandriana, home of John McKnitt Alexander, three miles east of Hopewell Church toward Poplar Tent, to consider the alarming situation. And on May 19, at the call of Colonel Thomas Polk, representatives of the various militia companies, and many other interested citizens assembled in Charlottetown.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk, comes up on stage from left center to full right, showing courthouse front at center and Joe Nicholson's tavern, right. A throng of men and women, children, young people mill in the street and in front of the two buildings. Several men walk up the court house steps and disappear inside. Men are congregated on the tavern porch, women knotted in groups in the street. The front of the tavern is cut away to reveal the interior, which is also thronged with men. Now the light narrows to the area in front of the tavern, as a man comes out and turns to go toward the courthouse. As he does so an old man steps out of the crowd, addresses him.

MAN

Mr. Davidson, this yere's Hector McElrath from up at Centre Church. I come down with a bunch o' our

fokes. Dr. Ephraim Brevard and some t'others are over there in the court house, but the rest o' us has been over here at the tavern mostly. We wondered what's agoin' on over there. [*He points toward court house.*] I figured you been over there most o' the time.

JOHN DAVIDSON

Yes, I have. I just stepped over here for a little refreshment from those long speeches.

HECTOR

What are they mostly talkin' about?

DAVIDSON

Well, sir, there are varying opinions, some expressing caution, others ready right now to declare ourselves independent of England. But excuse me, I've got to get back to the court house.

As he starts to leave, the attention of the crowd suddenly is upon a man who comes riding up from right on a heavily lathered horse. Quickly he dismounts, throws the reins over the peg in the hitching post in front of Nicholson's, walks toward tavern, nodding to people in front. One of them speaks to him.

MAN

Stranger, you been aridin' fast, ain't you?

RIDER

Yeh, and a long way, too. I'm in bad need of a good swig. [*He stops.*] Seems to be a big crowd about. What's going on?

MAN

Yeh, we're having a convention of delegates from hereabouts to consider the situation of the colonies—

RIDER

The situation is worse than you think. That's what I'm here for. I was sent to bring the news that the British are already warring on us. A month ago today it was they fired on our militia at Lexington in Massachusetts and killed some of our men.

There is a hubbub of angry exclamations from the people and from the outskirts of the throng men and women hurry toward the tavern. John Davidson takes the stranger by the arm.

DAVIDSON

Come inside, sir, and refresh yourself, and then I want you to go with me over to the court house and give this astounding news to the convention delegates.

As they go inside the tavern the light fades.

SCENE III

The light comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

The startling news brought by the express messenger from Massachusetts colony spurred the delegates to take decisive action. But it is past midnight when the report of the committee—Rev. Hezekiah J. Balch, twenty-seven-

year old first pastor of Poplar Tent Church; Dr. Ephraim Brevard, thirty-one, of Centre Church; and Will Kennon of Salisbury in Rowan—is presented.

The report calls for independence from England. It is a definite declaration of Mecklenburg's right and determination to be free. The declaration is adopted, and as the candles in the little log court house burn low the secretary, John McKnitt Alexander of Hopewell, calls the roll and one by one the delegates advance to the pine table—dissenters all—and solemnly sign their names to the document.

The date is May 20, 1775. They do not know it, but these doughty souls have signed themselves into immortality. The candles sputter out as the weary delegates seek their rest. Colonel Polk, they have decreed, will read the declaration to the people after they have assmbled before the court house in the afternoon.

This the resolute colonel of Mecklenburg militia has just now finished doing.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk, comes up on the front of the court house. A large crowd of men, women, and children stand in front of the high steps. On the small platform at the top of the steps Colonel Polk is rolling up a large sheet. Beside him stand Abraham Alexander, chairman of the convention; John McKnitt Alexander, secretary; Rev. Hezekiah J. Balch, Dr. Ephraim Brevard, and Will Kennon, members of the committee.

As Colonel Polk concludes the reading, the crowd cheers lustily. And then a man mounts the steps and signals the throng to be quiet. The shouting subsides.

MAN

Speaking for the folks down around Providence and Philadelphia Churches, as well as the rest o' ye, I 'spect, I can say that we stand behind the delegates in what they've just done. We may all be hung for it, but as for me, I'm glad the delegates did what they did. We'll never have freedom to run our affairs the way we want 'em run until we're an independent country, and that's a fact. I'm agin' kings and royal governors and church prelates arunnin' our business. Yes, sir, what's been done has my support.

Now he turns to face the group on the court house platform, points to the Rev. M. Balch.

But I'd like to have a speech out o' that young preacher up there. He's one of the committee, they tell me, which wrote up this declaration, and his name's signed to it. He's young, but he's got a head on his shoulders, and he comes nigher to bein' old Pastor Craighead than any other man in these parts, in my opinion. Let's hear from Pastor Balch!

The throng shouts its enthusiastic approval of the suggestion, and Rev. Mr. Balch steps forward to the railing of the balcony.

BALCH

Thank you, my friend from the South Side, and all you other loyal Mecklenburgers. My name is indeed signed to that paper.

He points to the document in Colonel Polk's hand.

And though I may hang for it, as my Providence friend Rea has said, I'm not afraid, and could I recall this early morning's hour when by candlelight we ad-

vanced to the table and signed our names to that document, could I recall that moment and keep my seat and leave my signature off, I would not do it, my friends! No, I am proud to have signed it in the company of these brave God-fearing men of Mecklenburg, these brother Presbyterians who have gladly thrown their challenge in the very teeth of a persecuting mother country.

We people in America cannot live under tyranny. We will not so live! We must live in freedom. Did not our fathers, did not even some of you standing here before me, cast off the shackles of the old country and come to these shores to be free? Did you not envision a new land where you might live and work and worship as free men, dictated to by neither kings nor prelates? Indeed, you did.

And that paper— [*He points again.*]
is a declaration of our determination to be free. It is a blow for liberty. And though we cannot foresee what the future may bring, let us be confident that the promulgation here in this little back country court house of our ringing declaration of independence will have a powerful effect in other sections of the colonies. I see them following our lead until throughout all America men will proclaim their determination to be free!

The people shout their approval and some throw their hats into the air.

But, my friends—

He holds up his hand to quiet them.

do not think that the battle for freedom is won. It has but started. I see the enemies of liberty, the determined foes of democracy and the rights of the individual man, the princes and the prelates, maddened to a new fury by

what we have done here today. I see a new assault upon America—upon our beliefs, our ideals, our very shores. I see bloodshed and weeping and dying, and for a time fear may seize us and we may be sorrowful almost unto despair. But in the end, we shall be victorious, my friends, if we faint not, if we hold on to courage and faith—if in great humility and patience and much prayer we maintain a steadfast claim upon our Father's care, knowing that He will defend us against all evil; if this we do, my dear friends, we shall make secure the freedom we have today declared. But we must fight and never flag, we must pray without ceasing, we must never for a moment loose our hold upon the faith that through the years has sustained our fathers and us. May God will it!

VOICE FROM CROWD

Praise the Lord! This young preacher sounds every whit like old Pastor Craighead!

The throng applauds Reverend Mr. Balch's talk and many shout and throw up their hats, as the light fades.

SCENE IV

The light comes up on Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

Thus, on May 20, 1775, this group of doughty dissenters promulgated the first declaration of independence made in America. Nine of the twenty-seven signers, church historians record, were Presbyterian ruling

elders, and all the others or virtually all, were members of Presbyterian churches. The voice of Alexander Craighead, dead and buried at Sugaw Creek these nine years, had come thunderously alive in the wilderness of Revolutionary Mecklenburg.

But as young Balch had warned, independence though declared would not be achieved until the people had given much in toil and tears and blood and sacrifice. Balch himself in another spring would be dead and from his short labors laid to rest in the center of the graveyard at Poplar Tent.

Soon the land between the Yadkin and the Catawba was rampant with revolution. Many a muster ground thudded to the uncadenced tramping of back country Carolinians; many a raucous voice shouted unmilitary but effective and quickly obeyed commands. On their way to war determined men moved horseback and afoot through the towering oaks and the soughing pines, northward toward Brandywine and Germantown and Valley Forge, southward to meet the British challenge to Charleston and the coastal region.

And as men marched and fought and struggled and died the voices of the ministers thundered from their pulpits or prayed in distant camps or gave comfort on bloody battlegrounds. Craighead and Balch were present only in challenging spirit, but David Caldwell, Joseph Alexander, nephew of Hezekiah and John McKnitt and Craighead's successor at Sugaw Creek, and Samuel E. McCorkle, all of them New Siders from Princeton College, shouted defiance of princes and prelates. And James Hall of Fourth Creek and Thomas H. McCaule of Centre marched to battle at the head of companies.

Five years after the Mecklenburgers had issued their defiant declaration, the war moved southward from New England and Pennsylvania and pushed upward from Charleston's Low Country, and in late September the Redcoats trudged northward past Providence Church to invade little Charlottetown.

Cornwallis was not long realizing he had struck a hornet's nest. Along the narrow street and about the little court house the militiamen under Colonial William R. Davie and Major Joe Graham fought doggedly to stop the invaders, while William Lee Davidson, now a 34-year-old brigadier, halted his larger force on the Salisbury road in the Mallard Creek section.

The Stated Clerk pauses as the sound of musketry is heard far off right, and the light dims on him to come up on forestage, center, revealing a young woman and a boy. The woman is leading a cow. Horses' hoofbeats are heard.

WOMAN

[*Pausing.*] Andy, the British must be in Charlottetown, and the fightin's headed this way! Let's stake Bossy and get home quick!

The light comes up strong on Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

But in Charlottetown the few Americans, perhaps not more than twenty, could not stop the Redcoats, who pursued them in a running fight past Sugaw Creek Church, where in a sharp skirmish young George Locke was killed, several were wounded, and Joe Graham with

three bullet wounds and six sabre cuts, was left unconscious and supposedly dead.

But at dusk that late September afternoon when the Widow Wilson's cow failed to come up for milking, she and her daughter Susannah and a visiting young kinsman went in search. And over beyond Sugaw Creek Church, ladies and gentlemen, perhaps not far from where you sit tonight—

The light fades on the Stated Clerk and comes up on two women dressed in pioneer garb and wearing sunbonnets, forestage near center, where they are spotlighted. One appears to be in her late thirties, the other the late teens. They are some distance apart and seem to be searching. Suddenly the older turns and calls over her shoulder.

WOMAN

Oh, Andrew. Andrew-w-w!

VOICE OF BOY

[*Off left, rear.*] Here I am, Auntie. Jes' alookin' in these here br'ars.

WOMAN

You seen any signs of her—any tracks or places where she took off through the bushes?

VOICE OF BOY

No'm. She aint been thisaway.

Meanwhile the girl has wandered farther toward right as she gazes about. Suddenly she muffles a scream as she almost stumbles.

GIRL

Mother! Mother! Come here!

She bends over, drops to her knees, then looks up and toward rear, left, calls out loudly.

Andy! Oh, Andy-y-y! Come here, boy! Quick!

The woman has rushed over to her, bends down.

I thought he was dead at first. But he isn't, though he's hurt bad. Been bleeding a lot.

The boy, in early teens, comes running up.

BOY

He's a soldier, Auntie. I bet he got hurt in the fightin' over this way today—what we heard from yo' house.

He bends down low, looks closely.

He's hurt pretty bad, Susy. D'you know who he is? Turn him over, Susy, so's we kin see his face. But be easy with him. Let me help.

WOMAN

Yes, be easy with him, Susy. He's likely bad hurt and it might start him bleeding more.

GIRL

He's still bleeding some. Here, Andy—

She jerks off a light scarf she's wearing about her shoulders.

help me tie up his arm here. He's been cut bad.

They work with the scarf a moment and then turn him over carefully.

Mother, it's Joe Graham! But he's so pale I hardly knew him.

WOMAN

He's lost so much blood, Susy.

Looking down into his face.

Yes, it's Joe Graham, all right. May the Lord help the boy! He's been mighty nigh killed.

She turns to the boy.

Quick, Andrew, run down to the spring and fetch a gourd o' water.

BOY

Yes'm.

He runs off, right rear. The two women work with the wounded youth. The mother removes her scarf and uses it to bind a wound. Soon the boy returns, carrying a gourd of water. Carefully they raise the wounded man's head, hold the gourd to his lips. The boy, standing above them, looks with steady gaze at the fallen soldier.

BOY

I hate them Britishers! I wisht every one of 'em was dead!

SUSY

Why Andy Jackson!

WOMAN

Andrew, you shouldn't say that. It's not Christian to talk so.

BOY

But look what they done to him, Auntie. And look what they done to me down at Camden. And my mama—

WOMAN

Yes, you've been provoked to such thoughts, I'll admit, boy; but nevertheless it's not Christian to think such.

The wounded man has begun to mumble incoherently; he's regaining consciousness.

SUSY

You're all right, Joe. [*Bending down.*] We found you out here whilst hunting for the cow. It's me, Joe, Susannah Wilson, and Mama, and Andy Jackson. We'll be taking you home now and pretty soon you'll be all right again.

They raise his head and now he drinks more easily from the gourd.

D'ye think you can stand to be helped to our house? It's just a short piece away.

He nods, smiling wanly, and the two women tenderly set him on his feet, and each lifts an arm around her shoulder to support him. They begin to move slowly forward. Behind them the boy picks up young Graham's musket, follows them, as the light fades.

SCENE V

The light comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

The Widow Wilson and her daughter Susannah hid young Joe Graham in their attic and carefully nursed him until he was able to slip away. By late fall he was back with the Carolina militia.

Meanwhile General Cornwallis, assailed at every turn by the straight-shooting Mecklenburgers who made his lordship's foraging for food a desperately hazardous undertaking and alarmed at the rout of Ferguson at Kings Mountain, after only sixteen days in Charlottetown had determined to withdraw into South Carolina.

And now at the home of Captain McDowell below Steele Creek Church on the road to the river a detachment of hungry Redcoats have stopped to plunder his place. The soldiers have been raiding the smokehouse, the barns and feedhouse and hog pens, and now they are catching the chickens. Mrs. McDowell, at home with the children while her husband is with the militia on the other side of Charlottetown, with her mounting fury has abandoned caution. She comes to her back door at the moment the British officer happens near it.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk and comes up on rear of the McDowell House, a two-story log structure. About the house scurry British soldiers, their arms filled with provisions, which they are loading on wagons beyond house and not in sight. The house, forestage, center, faces audience, and a young woman, with two children peeping from behind her skirt, stands in the doorway shaking her fist at a Redcoat a few paces away.

MRS. MCDOWELL

A fine gentleman and soldier you are, sir, setting your savages to plunder a defenseless woman whose got no husband or menfolks here to offer protection. Yes, sir, [*satirically*] a fine Christian gentleman you are, indeed!

OFFICER

But, madam, my men are hungry, nigh starvation. Because of you rebellious subjects of 'is Majesty in these parts, we have found it difficult to get food ever since we set foot in Charlottetown. This is the most damnably rebellious country we've come upon in America. You won't sell food, you won't give us food, you shoot down our foraging parties—

MRS. MCDOWELL

[*Smiling coldly.*] I heard how some dozen boys up in Hopewell at Mr. McIntyre's set six hundred Britishers arunnin'. If there was just three or four here today, I'm bound they'd drive off the lot o' you! But you come plunderin' when the menfolks are away!

A Redcoat who has been listening to her tirade approaches the officer.

SOLDIER

Captain McDowell, sir, if ye say the word, I'll gladly give her a good clout and shove 'er back in the 'ouse. If ye'll just say—

MRS. MCDOWELL

[*Interrupting.*] Did you say Captain McDowell? Did I hear you aright?

OFFICER

You did so madam. I'm Captain McDowell.

MRS. MCDOWELL

McDowell, eh? Now this is a pretty kettle o' fish. One Captain McDowell comes arobbin' anither Captain McDowell.

OFFICER

Your husband's a Captain McDowell, madam?

MRS. MCDOWELL

Indeed, and likely your relative, your cousin, likely as not. Aren't you Scotch, and Presbyterian likewise?

OFFICER

I am indeed, and not asking anyone's pardon because o' it.

MRS. MCDOWELL

Would our Pastor McRee were here to tell ye, Captain McDowell, what he thinks o' a Scotch Presbyterian who would come across the sea to do the will o' an unprincipled king and prelate in killing and robbing other Scotch Presbyterians, and some o' them kinsmen besides. How can ye reconcile such conduct, sir?

OFFICER

I'm in the British army, madam; I must obey the commands given me. [*Less sternly.*] But where is my cousin, your husband?

MRS. MCDOWELL

And should I tell you so that you hunt him up to kill him? He's in the American army, as you well know a Scotch Presbyterian should be, afightin' to defend his country from the tyrannical rule o' your king and your Church of Englanders. More than that I shall not tell you.

OFFICER

I had no doubt he was a rebel. And were I in his place, madam, I would likely be the same myself. But

you know I don't want to kill him, though I would like to have a talk with a kinsman even if he's a rebel. And I'm sorry, madam, to have caused you pain today.

He bows to her, turns to the soldier beside him.

Tell them to turn the stock and the chickens loose, Percy. We came to the wrong place.

To the woman.

And when your husband returns, madam, give him his cousin's—shall I say, affectionate—regards.

He salutes her gravely, walks toward his soldiers, as the light fades.

SCENE VI

The light comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

So in October Cornwallis was gone from Mecklenburg. Soon in Charlottetown Greene took over the American command from Gates, while General Davidson rode Mecklenburg and Rowan seeking militia recruits. And early in January Cornwallis began moving northward from Winnsboro. At the Cowpens on January 17 these militiamen, most of them Davidson's men, under Daniel Morgan gave Tarleton a sound beating. Cornwallis, circling northward, came after Morgan, pushing now toward Salisbury, and the Redcoats, staying west of the Catawba, reached the river at Beattie's Ford not far from Centre Church.

Once again General Davidson appealed for volunteers with which to stop Cornwallis. Couriers raced over the back country. One reached Fourth Creek Church while

the pastor, Reverend James Hall, was preaching. He walked up the aisle, handed the preacher Davidson's message. Mr. Hall quickly ended his sermon, stepped from the pulpit, read the paper. The next day, with the preacher as captain of the company, the Fourth Creek men left to join Davidson on the Catawba. There they found Parson McCaule and his men from Centre.

But the advancing Redcoats swarmed across the river at Cowan's Ford just below Beattie's. Three or four Americans were killed. One of them was General William Lee Davidson. He had been slain by a Tory who had served as the Redcoat guide.

All day his body, stripped of clothing, lay in the pouring rain. That night it was recovered by Pastor McCaule and two brother Presbyterians from Hopewell, young Major David Wilson, brother-in-law of Major John Davidson, and Richard Barry, signer of the Mecklenburg declaration, in whose yard almost thirty years before long dead John Thomson had preached the gospel to the pioneer settlers.

They carried the body of General Davidson to the home of David Wilson's mother, where they dressed it in a suit left there by her brother, Captain James Jack. Already the tragic message had been sent to Mary Brevard Davidson, and with a devoted neighbor, George Templeton, accompanying her, she had started on the arduous, sad ride to Hopewell.

There, in the graveyard beside the church this resolute young mother of seven, the last the month-old namesake of his father, stands in the flickering light of fat-pine torches while beloved Pastor McCaule lays away the body of the soldier's soldier to its long slumber.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk, and a red spotlight, heightened by the light of several pine torches held high, reveals the graveyard of Hopewell Presbyterian Church, forestage, center. A little cluster of men and women stand about a freshly filled grave, with the minister at the head. Two men with shovels step back, push the shovels upright into the earth, and stand aside. Several women advance and lay pine boughs on the red clay mound. Then they stand back. The minister reaches down, picks up a little of the earth from the mound, lets it trickle from his hand slowly as he intones:

MINISTER

Ashes to ashes, earth to earth, dust to dust.

He takes a small book from his coat pocket, opens it, and begins to read.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also.

Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also; and from henceforth ye know him and have seen him.

He closes the book, returns it to his pocket.

In deepest sorrow we have assembled here to say a last sad farewell, to pay a feeble but warmly sincere tribute to our great and good friend who has taken his departure for his Father's house.

We mourn, and we feel helpless and lost in the path of our enemies, and we are torn with anguish; and yet, my beloved ones, let us not be troubled in heart, for in faith we believe that tonight he rests happy and secure and safe from all harm in the mansion his Saviour has prepared for him. Let us be happy rather that he has come into his eternal joy.

In the supreme sense our Lord Jesus gave His life for the redemption and salvation of His people. Let us be proud now and grateful to our Father that our departed loved one was willing to give his life in unwavering support of those things he and we believe right, that he did not hesitate to give his uttermost that his people might be free, that they might live and work and worship unfettered by prince or prelate, that in this good new land they might forever be privileged to build a better life.

Remembering his courage and his devotion, let us take courage to continue his good fight until we are freed of all tyranny, let us with devotion and praying the Father's help work with renewed vigor to establish and secure a brave new nation owing allegiance and paying tribute to none save our God.

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions.

The minister is silent a moment, his eyes upon the pine-covered grave before him. Then he raises his eyes, and smiling through his tears, speaks:

And now, to the praise of Almighty God and our own comforting, let us sing with thanksgiving the twenty-third Psalm.

He leads as the little company sings:

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,
He makes me down to lie in pastures green;
He leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again,
And me to walk doth make within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for His own Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill; for Thou art with me,
And Thy rod and staff me comfort still.

A table Thou hast furnished me in presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me,
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.

As the song ends the minister raises his head, closes his eyes, and the flickering torches light his face as he prays:

MINISTER

Shaken and sorrowful and sorely distressed, O our Father, we pray Thy blessings upon us this night. Sustain and comfort and keep in the hollow of Thy hand her, our sister, who is left without a husband and the seven children left fatherless, O God. Protect and sustain them as only Thou canst do.

We thank Thee, O God, for his life and his example, and we pray that Thou woulds't bring to full accomplishment those good things for which he was willing to give his all. Protect those his friends he led, and give Thou victory to our arms, and comfort us all, for we ask it in the name of Thy blessed Son our Lord.

He raises his hands for the benediction.

And now may the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you forever. Amen.

The minister goes over to Mrs. Davidson, takes her hands in his, and the others group about her, as the light fades and the torches are extinguished.

SCENE VII

The light comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

The British were exultant over the results of the fighting around Cowan's Ford on the bleak day of February

1. Cornwallis reported to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in England that his victory "so effectually dispirited the Militia that we met with no further opposition in our march to the Yadkin, through one of the most rebellious tracts in America."

Nor was General Greene able to stop Cornwallis at Guilford Court House, and the British commander marched on into Virginia.

But there he would see his good fortune shortly ended, and at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, eight and a half months after William Lee Davidson by the light of the flickering torches had been buried in the drenched red soil of Hopewell, Cornwallis would surrender to George Washington.

Independence had been achieved. Mecklenburg's desperate daring had won. Soon now a new nation, freed of the tyranny of prince and prelate, would take its place on the stage of world history.

And one day into the little village of Charlottetown the momentous tidings would come.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk, comes up on the street in front of the Mecklenburg court house and Joe Nicholson's ordinary. Several men are in front of the court house and one is walking down the steps. Three or four women and several children are shopping at the market beneath the court house. The lighted interior of the ordinary reveals several men crowded before the bar and seated at a table near center of room. Other men and two or three women, with several children, are walking along the little street. Other children play in foreground. As the light comes up on the

scene the sound of galloping horses is heard and from far off stage at left two riders dash up, dismount in front of the rack at the ordinary, and tie their sweat-lathered mounts. They walk briskly toward the ordinary porch. From the porch a man speaks, his voice revealing excitement, concern:

MAN

I hope it's not bad news you're bringing, Mr. Alexander. Judging by the looks of your horses, you've been ridin' 'em hard.

JOHN MCKNITT ALEXANDER

No, Abner, it's not bad news. It's great news, man! We've galloped almost all the way from Alexandriana to proclaim it.

ABNER

What! Good news, you say! What are the tidings you fetch?

Already men are coming out on the ordinary porch to find out what is causing the excitement.

ALEXANDER

This is Mr. Murphy from Salisbury. He fetches the word that Cornwallis has surrendered up in Virginia to General Washington!

Immediately there is a storm of talk and shouting, and a man runs toward the court house and begins to beat with an iron rod on a plow-point suspended from a post. At once people start running out from the market place

under the court house and the room above, as well as the ordinary. In another instant they come rushing in from right and left. A man grabs Alexander by the arm, points toward the court house, leads the tall, slender ruling elder of Hopewell to the steps, which Alexander mounts. He holds up his hand for silence.

ALEXANDER

My friends, I'm happy to be able to tell you that Earl Cornwallis has surrendered to General George Washington. The surrender was at a place called Yorktown up in Virginia. The news was fetched to us by Mr. Murphy, from Salisbury.

Alexander points toward his companion, who has followed him over to a place near the foot of the steps.

We're free now, free and independent colonies. There are no kings over us now, nor prelates. We're a free country at last!

The people begin shouting and the men throw up their hats. From the throng emerges, forestage center, a very old man with a battered fife.

MAN

I'm shore glad old Hector McElrath come to Charlottetown today. Wouldn't 'a' missed this here doin's for a ha' crown. Hey fokes, git yo'selves partners and le's celebrate!

He begins blowing on his fife, and immediately several of the younger men and women

and older children form a big circle. Now Hector stops blowing the fife.

Ever'body got a partner? All right, swing yo' partner and promenade.

He begins playing the fife again and they start circling.

All right, lady round the lady and the gent go slow. Lady round the lady and the gent don't go. Swing 'em! Heh!

As the dancers go into the figure of lady-round-the-lady the light gradually fades, and the fife, which has been supplemented by the strings in the orchestra, is silent.

SCENE VIII

The light comes up on Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

So with joyous hearts they celebrated the winning of their freedom. But not alone with festive music and dancing on village street or in many a back country cabin or even the new rock house of Hezekiah Alexander in Sugaw Creek. For these early Mecklenburgers knew in their hearts that the same God who had brought their fathers and them from Scotland and Ireland to New England and Pennsylvania and Charleston and on into the Carolina wilderness had wrought this victory, and to Him they gave thanks.

So they gathered at the churches—down in Providence and Steele Creek, at Sugaw Creek and Rocky River and Poplar Tent and Hopewell, and up at Centre

—and lifted hearts and voices in praise and thanksgiving to the Author of all freedoms.

And on a Sabbath day shortly after Yorktown, with Captain James Hall, pastor of Centre, supplying the pulpit, the faithful have assembled at Sugaw Creek for a thanksgiving service culminating in the sweetly solemn observance of the Lord's Supper. The preparatory services have been held, the tokens distributed, the morning's sermon preached, and seated at a long table in the aisle, the members and their visiting brethren have partaken of the symbolical bread and wine. And now the service is nearing the end.

The light fades on the Stated Clerk, comes up on Sugaw Creek Church as in Scene X, Act I. Lights concealed from the audience illumine the interior, revealing Reverend Mr. Hall, left, in pulpit, with men and women seated at a long table running from front to rear of the church. As the lights go on, the minister is praying and the people are bowed.

REVEREND MR. HALL

For all these things, O God, are we grateful. For the victory Thou hast given us, again we offer our humble thanks, O God of the nations. And for the great honor Thou hast accorded us this morning, O our beloved Jesus, our brother and Lord, and for the great joy we have had in communing together with Thee, we do most devoutly thank Thee.

And now, O our Father, out of the victory of these Thy colonies, woefully weak and separated though they be, will Thou in Thy good time and way establish a

great and good nation, O God. a nation always honoring and never forsaking Thee and Thy ways, a mighty nation of free and brave and good people, a *good* land, O our God? In the name of Thy blessed Son we ask Thee. Amen.

The people raise their heads.

REVEREND MR. HALL

And now, my beloved friends, let us with truly joyful and grateful hearts sing that great old song of thanksgiving.

He opens the book and reads.

To Thee, most high and holy God, To Thee our thankful hearts we raise;
Thy works declare Thy name abroad, Thy wondrous works demand our praise.

To bondage doomed, Thy chosen sons beheld their foes triumphant rise;
And sore oppressed by earthly thrones, they sought the Sovereign of the skies.

Twas then, great God, with equal power, arose Thy vengeance and Thy grace
To scourge their legions from the shore, and have the remnant of Thy race.

Let haughty sinners sink their pride, nor lift so high their scornful head;
But lay their impious thoughts aside, and own the empire God hath made.

Now let us all join in singing this glorious old song.

The leader advances to the front, lifts tuning fork, strikes it, and the congregation, as the minister signals it to rise, stands and without accompaniment sings.

As the song is ended, the light fades, and comes up on the Stated Clerk.

STATED CLERK

So now, my friends, on this note of praise and thanksgiving our play ends. Will the audience rise, and in tribute to those hardy souls of our wilderness days whose voices and hands made secure for us the freedoms we enjoy and in glory to their God and ours—join the cast in singing that great old hymn, "Faith of Our Fathers"?

The light goes out on the Stated Clerk, comes up brilliantly on the full stage, showing the complete cast gathered in and around Sugaw Creek Church, and the orchestra and organ in full volume accompany the cast and audience as the hymn is sung.

With the ending of the singing, the orchestra and organ strike up with spirit the National Anthem.

The audience lights go on.

END OF PLAY

VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

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